General rules:

1) You **can not** use singular countable nouns alone. You need to define them (use *a, the, this, that, some, my*, etc.).

Be careful of **the** dog! (*we mean some specific dog*)
She has **a** black dog. (*we mention it for the first time*)

2) In some cases, you need to use the indefinite article, if you can replace it with "**one**", and the definite article, if you can replace it with "**that**".

He has **a** daughter = She has **one** daughter.
Give me **the** battery = Give me **that** battery.

3) You **can not** use the indefinite article (*a, an*) with **plural** or **uncountable** nouns.

Indefinite Article

**There are 2 types** of the indefinite article: **a** and **an**
- **a** is used before consonants: **a** table, **a** chair
- **an** is used before a vowels: **an** apricot, **an** egg, **an** intelligent man

**But:**

You need to use "**an**" before "**h**" if it is not pronounced: an honest man, an hour
You need to use "**a**" before "**u**" if it is pronounced like [ju]: a uniform, a used car.

**Important:** the indefinite article can be used **only** with a) countable nouns and b) singular nouns.
You can't use it before nouns like "milk, advice, information" (*uncountable nouns*) or "students", "children" (*nouns in plural*).

A boy (*singular, countable*) but boys (*plural*)
A cup of tea (*singular, countable*) but tea (*uncountable*)

When you need to use the indefinite article:

1) Before a noun that we mention **for the first time, an unspecified person, thing or event**

I am going to buy **a** hat.
Is there **a** hotel near here? **BUT:** We enjoyed our holiday. **The** hotel was really nice.
(we mean the specific hotel)

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2) In the meaning of "one" or “one of”

I'd like a glass of water.
I'd like a tea please! (meaning "one cup of tea").
She is a colleague of John (John has many colleagues).

3) Before a countable noun that is preceded by an adjective.

It is a nice flat.
I need a new car.
Have a good time! BUT: I don't have time (in this situation, time is uncountable).
We had a wonderful trip! BUT: It was truly amazing travel (trip is countable, but travel is uncountable)

4) After WHAT in exclamations

What a beautiful view! BUT: What beautiful scenery (scenery is uncountable).
What an interesting film!
What a good suggestion! BUT: What good advice! (advice is uncountable)

5) After SUCH, if we want to intensify the meaning

This is such a difficult issue!
My new boss is such an arrogant man!
BUT: It is such wonderful weather (because weather is uncountable)

6) When we speak about professions, religions and nationalities.

He is a doctor. BUT: She went to the doctor (her usual doctor)
She is a sales representative.
He is an American (noun). It is also possible to say: He is American (adjective).
She is a Buddhist (noun). It is also possible to say: She is Buddhist (adjective).

7) When we express amounts of things.

She comes twice a day.
He drove 80 kilometres an hour.
They receive about 25 a week (or per week).
It costs 3 dollars a kilo (or per kilo).
Definite Article

The use of the definite article:

1) Before a noun when you mean something or somebody specific.

I'd like to speak to the manager. (You mean the manager of this shop).
We had a very nice meal last night. The fish was very good. (You mean the fish you ate last night)

He spilled the juice all over the floor (here you mean some specific juice, perhaps the juice you needed for breakfast)
BUT: He spilled juice all over the floor (just juice).

2) Before a noun which has already been mentioned, i.e. the listener (or the reader) knows what exactly the speaker (or the writer) means.

I had a sandwich and an apple for breakfast. The sandwich was a bit stale, but the apple was sweet and juicy.

3) Before a noun which describes a unique thing, object or title.

The moon goes round the earth, and the earth goes round the sun.
I like to look at the stars in the sky.
The internet has changed our life style.
People need to protect the environment.
Have you ever crossed the equator?
The North Pole is the northernmost point on the Earth, lying diametrically opposite the South Pole.
The Queen will visit our city!

BUT: We can use "Earth" without the (if we mean that it is a planet in space, like Mars, Venus etc.) and we can use space without the definite article.
Which planet is closest to Earth?
There are millions of stars in space.

4) Before ordinal numbers: the first, the sixth, the eleventh...

John lives on the third floor.

5) With superlatives of adjectives.

The best person, the most important.
He is the finest young player.
6) In the expression "**the same**".

Your dress is **the** same colour as mine.
Are these cars **the** same?

7) In some **time expressions**

- in **the** past
- in **the** present
- in **the** future

- in **the** morning
- in **the** afternoon
- in **the** evening

- at **the** beginning
- at **the** moment
- for **the** time being
- all **the** while

I am sorry, I can't speak to you at **the** moment.
We played tennis in **the** morning.

8) In some **place expressions**.

- at **the** top
- at **the** end
- in **the** middle
- on **the** right
- on **the** left

- in **the** north
- in **the** south
- in **the** west
- in **the** east

The table is in **the** middle of the room.
The most densely populated region in **the** south-west of the United Kingdom.
He lives in **the** north of Brazil. BUT: He lives in **northern Brazil** (without **the**).

9) For the nouns **followed by "of-phrases"** or by a **descriptive subordinate clause**

There are many interesting places in **the** countries of Central Europe.
Ancient Greeks believed in **the** healing power of honey.

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It is the man we saw yesterday!

10) Before some public places (go to the cinema, the theatre, the bank, the post office, the station, the airport):

I never go to the theatre but I often go to the cinema. Are you going to the bank? BUT: Is there a bank near here? (doesn't matter which bank)
He is at the airport now.

11) Before the names of hotels, theatres, museums, cinemas, galleries, sights.

He will stay in the Sheraton. (hotel)
They visited the Kremlin.
I enjoyed my visit of the Guggenheim Museum.
Did you go up the Eiffel Tower?

12) In the phrases go to the doctor, the dentist.

I don't like going to the dentist. BUT: He works as a dentist (here his profession is meant)
She went to the doctor.

13) Before groups of people: nations, families.

The Chinese invented printing.
The Smiths live close to us.

14) Before a specific type of animal or machine.

The giraffe is the tallest of all animals. BUT: We saw a giraffe at the zoo (we mean one giraffe)
The bicycle is an excellent means of transport. BUT: I go to work by bus.

15) Before nouns which were made of adjectives.

We must care about the old.
The state provides loans for the unemployed.
Do you think the rich should pay higher taxes?
Our government needs to do more to help the homeless.

16) Before musical instruments

Laura plays the flute and the piano.
I want to learn how to play the guitar.
17) Before "radio".

I listen to the radio a lot. **BUT:** I watch television a lot (zero article).

18) **Newspaper titles and books (The Independent, The Sunday Times).**

I've read The Firm by John Grisham.

19) **Canals, rivers, seas, oceans.**

The Suez Canal is an artificial waterway in Egypt.
The Thames is a river in England.
We visited the Mediterranean Sea.
We will travel to the Black Sea.
Have you been to the Pacific Ocean?

20) **Geographical areas (groups of countries) or compass points**

The Middle East, the Far East, the Asia, the West
He travelled all over the Middle East.

21) **Forests**

Have you been to the Black Forest?

22) **Deserts (the Sahara, the Gobi desert)**

I dream to see the Sahara some day.

**Zero Article (No Article)**

We use no article:

1) When we talk about things, ideas or people in general.

I don't eat meat.
Life is not possible without oxygen.
I like writing letters.
I don't like cold weather.

I like classical music. **BUT:** The film wasn't very interesting, but I liked the music (the speaker means the music in the film).
Children learn from playing. **BUT:** We took the children to the zoo *(the speaker means specific children)*

2) Before names of people.

**John Brown** lived next door.

3) Before days of the week and months.

We will stay in London till **Wednesday**.  
He will come back in **July**.

4) Before times of the day and night (midday, midnight, noon)

I would like it finished by **midday**.  
**Midnight** came soon. **BUT:** In the afternoon

5) Before meals (breakfast/ lunch/ dinner)

What did you have for **breakfast**?  
**Dinner** is ready!

6) Before "home" and "work"

I am going **home**.  
Are you going out tonight? - I am staying at **home**.

I'm going to **work** now.  
What time do you usually finish **work**?

7) Before some official places (school, college, university, hospital, prison, church)

What did you learn at **school**? **BUT:** Jane's mother went to the school to see her English teacher *(we mean a specific building)*.

He wants to go to **university**.  
Charles had an accident. He had to go to **hospital**.

David goes to **church** on Sundays. **BUT:** Two masters went to the church to repair the wall *(We mean a specific building)*

John's friend is in **prison** for robbery. **BUT:** John went to the prison to visit his friend *(He is a visitor, not a prisoner)*.

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8) Before means of transport and communication (by bus, by train, by car, by taxi, by plane, by email, by phone)

Usually I go to work by bus.
I will contact you by email.

9) Before next and last

I am not working next Thursday.
I travelled to Greece last summer.

10) Before phrases that consist of noun+number

Our train leaves from Platform 11.
Do you have such shoes in size 42?
We stayed in Room 22.

11) Before sports and games

He played football and basketball.

12) Before academic subjects and languages

He studies mathematics, biology and physics.
Do you think English is difficult?

I am interested in history. BUT: I am interested in the history of my country (of-phrase)

13) Before names of companies and airlines.

We visited the office of Fiat.
I often fly Singapore Airlines.

14) Before continents.

Have you been to Africa or South America?

15) Before countries (except plural: the Netherlands, the Philippines, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and except republics: the Republic of Ireland, the Dominican Republic)

We stayed in Italy.
She came back from Mexico.

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16) Before names of cities, towns.

**London** is the capital of the United Kingdom.
She lived in **Paris**.

17) Before names of streets and roads (except The High Street, The Strand)

Sherlock Holmes lived at **Baker Street**.
She lives at **Green Road**.

18) Before names of airports, stations, universities, castles.

Welcome to **Kennedy Airport!**
Last summer we visited **Edinburgh Castle**.
He will apply to **Cambridge University**.

19) Before lakes (except groups of lakes like the Great Lakes)

**Lake Erie** is located in Canada. **BUT**: They live near the lake.

20) Before mountains (except mountain chains the Andes, the Rockies)

He dreamt to climb **Mount Everest**.
They liked **Mount Fuji** so much.

21) Before names of islands (except island chains: the Aleutians, the Canary Islands)

Last year he visited **Easter Island**.
We want to go to **Maui**.